

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

This chapter describes key recommendations that will guide plan implementation over the next five to ten years and beyond, improving community livability in Eugene through parks, natural areas, facilities, and programs. These recommendations respond to the findings of the extensive community outreach program conducted as part of the PROS planning process.

The plan highlights include:

- Creating a balanced and equitable system of parks and recreation services;
- Providing an accessible and connected park system;
- Renovating and restoring existing parks and open space;
- Maintaining existing investments;
- Offering opportunities for community volunteerism; and
- Providing youth asset development.

Significant public outreach findings are included in each description. Key findings from the evaluation of natural areas and park amenities are also highlighted, when applicable.

A. Balanced and Equitable System

The Comprehensive Plan sets forth a vision of a balanced and equitable system of parks and recreation services. A range of opportunities and experiences that meet the diverse recreation interests and needs of Eugene residents will be provided.

Eugene's park system is composed of seven park types (Appendix A). Separately, each park type may serve a limited function, but collectively the parks and natural areas will serve the entire range of community needs. The park system of the future expands on Eugene's existing system by providing a neighborhood or community park easily accessible to most residents by bicycle or foot. Natural areas, metropolitan parks, urban plazas, and special use facilities will provide opportunities to enjoy nature, to protect our unique natural environment for future generations, and to engage in a variety of recreation activities with our friends, family and community. A network of linear parks and greenways will provide linkages within the community and to the region beyond for people and wildlife. The diverse park system will ensure a range of options and a variety of park experiences for Eugene residents, balancing active uses with passive uses and natural areas with more developed parks.



The diverse park system will provide a range of options and a variety of experiences

Park Types:

- Neighborhood Park
- Community Park
- Urban Plaza
- Metropolitan Park
- Natural Area Park
- Linear Park/ Greenway
- Special Use Facility

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Residents will have access to indoor and outdoor aquatic facilities that will promote health, wellness, and family fun year-round



In addition to offering a diversity of park types, Eugene will offer a range of recreation and educational programming that will reflect Eugene's diverse cultures and be accessible to residents of all abilities, ages, and economic backgrounds. Providing options for all members of the community – with an emphasis on youth development -- is a key aspect of the City's vision for recreation. Serving the needs of our growing adult population ages 50 and over will continue to be emphasized -- including meeting the diverse needs and interests of both active older adults as well as frail elderly residents. Eugene will also continue its leadership in and commitment to providing people with disabilities a diverse range of services from adapted programs to integrated services.

Some of the benefits provided by diverse recreation programs will include:

- Providing opportunities to enjoy nature and the outdoors;
- Connecting families and our community;
- Enhancing personal growth;
- Promoting health and wellness;
- Enjoying and learning about our cultural, historical, and environmental legacy; and
- Contributing to our community through increased volunteerism.

A variety of community recreation facilities will be available for programs and informal use. A system of recreation centers will be at the heart of this system and will be accessible to all residents. Residents will have access to indoor and outdoor aquatic facilities that will promote health, wellness and family fun year-round. Residents will enjoy walking and biking on multi-use paths and trails. A variety of sports facilities will be available to both youth and adult teams. New ideas and trends will be incorporated through a continuing community involvement process as new parks and facilities are designed.

As the City moves forward to enhance its park and recreation system, it will emphasize stronger partnerships with individuals, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses to better enable the City to reach its goals. These highly valued parks, recreation facilities, natural areas and recreation services will continue to make Eugene *a healthy, active and beautiful place in which to live, work and play*. Through this effort, Eugene will attract and retain businesses and residents, keeping our economy strong and vibrant.

Significant Public Involvement Findings

- Most people who participated in public outreach activities for the Comprehensive Plan believe that parks, recreation services, and natural areas are important to Eugene's quality of life. For example, more than 94% of Community Survey participants and 99% of Speakers Bureau participants indicated that parks, recreation, and natural areas are very important or important to Eugene's quality of life.
- Stakeholders in Eugene interviewed during the planning process recognized the need to expand parks and natural areas to keep up with population growth and to ensure that all residents have adequate access.
- Eugene residents prefer a diverse park system that provides a balance of active and natural area parks. When asked about the right proportion of parks for Eugene, more than half (52%) of Community Survey respondents said there should be an equal distribution of natural areas and active parks.
- Eugene has a high level of program participation. Well over half (57%) of Community Survey respondents participated in a City of Eugene recreation program or special event within the year prior to the survey. This is much higher than most communities, where program participation averages about 30% of the population.
- Community members think that more recreation programs should be offered. About 61% of Community Survey respondents and more than 75% of Speakers Bureau questionnaire respondents said that recreation programs should be increased. Community members also wanted the City of Eugene to continue in its role as the primary provider of these recreation services.
- The demographic analysis conducted for the PROS Comprehensive Plan indicated that Eugene is increasing in diversity. For example, the Hispanic population in Eugene more than doubled during the 1990s, and more residents identified themselves as Native American in 2000 than in 1990. The analysis also indicated that programs and facilities need to be responsive to a changing customer base by providing more programs that meet the needs of people from diverse cultures, providing staff training in understanding diversity, and developing a more diverse workforce.



57% of Community Survey respondents participated in a City of Eugene recreation program or special event within the year prior

B. Access and Connectivity



A recurring theme is the need for an interconnected and accessible system

A recurring theme throughout the comprehensive planning process was the need for a more interconnected and accessible park system. The Comprehensive Plan improves physical connections by expanding the City's linear park and trail system, providing connections within Eugene and to the broader region. It calls for improved coordination between parks and recreation and a variety of transportation providers. It builds on planning efforts such as Rivers to Ridges, the regional parks and open space vision, and TransPlan, the regional transportation plan. Trails and linear parks are a key element of the Comprehensive Plan. In addition to providing access to parks and natural areas, trails also are an important recreation resource.

Significant Public Involvement Findings

- According to Community Survey respondents, the top outdoor recreation facilities needed in Eugene today are multi-purpose trails connecting community facilities for biking, walking, etc.
- In an open-ended question, improving trails was the second most frequently mentioned individual improvement for all parks, open space, and recreation services, according to Speakers Bureau respondents.
- Multi-purpose trails are the second most highly used park and community facility, averaging 5.57 per capita visits annually, according to the Community Survey.
- Linear parks and trails support a number of recreation activities that are among the top 20 most popular in Eugene, including walking, dog walking, bicycling for pleasure, jogging/running, hiking, and bicycling for commute.

C. Renovations and Restoration



Eugene residents place high priority on providing stewardship of existing parks and our natural environment, including the highly valued neighborhood and community parks, ridgelines, rivers and waterways, agricultural lands, and unique and vanishing habitats. Parks are valued and heavily used, which results in wear and tear. Playground equipment, picnic facilities, and other park amenities wear out over time. Landscaping becomes overgrown, turf wears out, and heavy use compacts soil. Human activity affects the quality of our natural landscapes. While Eugene's park maintenance system is excellent, there is a substantial backlog of renovation and restoration needs and many more maintenance demands than can be accommodated.

The Comprehensive Plan emphasizes improvements to the existing system, including a renovation program to update critical recreation components and restoration strategies to protect natural resources. These improvements are suggested throughout the park system, including these priority areas:

- Significant natural areas;
- Children’s play areas;
- Restrooms;
- Sport fields and courts;
- Public buildings;
- ADA improvements to meet new and existing guidelines; and
- General park development features, such as lighting, irrigation, benches, picnic tables, walkways, and parking areas.

The comprehensive planning process provided Eugene with an opportunity to inventory and to assess its existing system of parks, natural areas and facilities. Through an extensive evaluation process, the condition of parks, natural areas and specific amenities was rated. Ratings range from 1 to 3, with a 1 being poor condition and a 3 being good condition.

Key Evaluation Findings

- In the Park Amenity Evaluation, the average rating for plantings/shrubs ranged from 1.7 to 3.0 for specific park types, which indicates that landscaping may require some renovation. Neighborhood and metropolitan parks need the most work.
- Site lighting received scores ranging from 1.0 to 2.3, suggesting that many of the lighting systems are in need of repair or are inoperable. Linear parks, along with neighborhood and metropolitan parks, require the most improvements.
- The average rating for signage ranged from 1.0 to 1.6, which means substantial improvements are needed. Signs may be damaged, old, or, in some cases, non-existent.
- Park furnishings were described, on average, as being in fair condition (with scores 2.0 to 2.3), indicating that replacement beyond routine maintenance may be needed.
- Average scores for children’s play areas range from 1.7 to 2.7. Seven neighborhood parks and one metropolitan park will need immediate repair or replacement.
- The average rating for turf ranged from 1.5 to 3.0. This indicates there are turf areas that need re-seeding, fertilization, or weeding.



*Eugene residents
place a high priority
on stewardship*

- Through the Natural Area Evaluation, all of Eugene’s metropolitan parks were found to have high potential for minor natural area enhancements to control invasive species. Half of the metropolitan parks were found to have high potential for significant natural area restoration, and half of the community parks were found to have medium or high potential for significant restoration.
- Half of Eugene’s neighborhood parks and almost all existing linear parks were found to have high potential for minor natural area enhancements to control invasive species.

Significant Public Involvement Findings

- Renovating existing parks is a high priority for Eugene residents. Upgrade/Complete existing parks ranked number one in desired park improvements, according to the Community Survey, the Speakers Bureau, and the Youth Questionnaire.
- Upgrading older parks, improving neighborhood parks, and renovating play areas were identified by several focus groups as needed improvements.
- The top three improvements for natural areas include providing more passive recreation opportunities, such as trails and benches; improving habitat in existing natural areas and removing invasive species; and acquiring more natural areas, according to respondents in the Community Survey, Eugene Celebration, and Speakers Bureau.
- Eugene's natural open spaces could be improved by providing additional public information, revising planning and design policies to emphasize natural resource values, and utilizing maintenance practices aimed at enhancing habitat and improving water quality, according to the Natural Resource and Open Space Focus Group.
- Some natural areas in Eugene may be over-used or impacted by humans and animals, according to key Stakeholders. Consequently, the need to expand and protect natural areas is greater.



D. Maintenance

Most respondents (82%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of maintenance in Eugene's parks when the PROS Community Survey was conducted in January 2003. Since then, the City's maintenance budget has been reduced. According to the results of the Baseline Financial Analysis, the City's annual budget for maintenance decreased from over \$4,500 per developed acre to about \$4,100 per developed acre between Fiscal Year (FY) 02 and FY 04, which indicates a decrease in maintenance services.

Park improvement projects have put increased demands on park maintenance. With the Parks and Open Space bond measure, the City has developed five new parks since 2003 and has been pursuing land acquisition to provide additional parks. Implementing the Comprehensive Plan will increase the park acreage and number of facilities, further increasing maintenance demands. Eugene is also increasing its inventory of natural areas, which creates a need for further emphasis on natural area management and restoration.

Maintaining community assets was identified as a priority for most residents. The Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the need for establishing a baseline level of support for park maintenance and for providing a tiered system of maintenance appropriate to each type of park. For example, maintenance standards and cost thresholds should be different for natural area parks as compared to neighborhood and community parks.

If the maintenance budget per acre is reduced, the overall quality of maintenance will diminish. This leads to the eventual degradation of a park system that is now valued by citizens as a community benefit. This Plan recommends that maintenance funding be increased to protect our valued assets as our park, natural area, and recreation facility inventory expands.

Key Evaluation Findings

- The Park Amenity Evaluation indicated that of the 50 neighborhood parks in Eugene, 19 had no plantings/shrubs. Of the remaining 31, the plantings/shrubs were in poor condition in 15 parks and were in fair condition in another 9 parks. Of the 34 neighborhood parks containing turf, results indicated that the majority (18) had turf in fair condition.
- The Park Amenity Evaluation found that plantings/shrubs in 3 of the 7 metropolitan parks were in poor condition.



Maintenance funding must be increased as our system expands

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- Poor condition turf, plantings and shrubs often result from inadequate maintenance. When maintenance budgets are limited, horticultural maintenance is often deferred so that day-to-day maintenance tasks such as mowing and trash removal can continue to occur.
- In Eugene's parks, 64 instances of rare plant communities, 22 instances of rare plant species, and 39 instances of rare animal species were identified through the Natural Area Evaluation. These valued resources have maintenance needs that are very different from a typical developed park landscape.
- Aquatic habitat is present in 52 of Eugene's parks. This means that a wetland, stream, or other aquatic habitat exists, and that water is present on the site for at least 9 months of the year. Aquatic habitat areas have specific maintenance needs that must be met to ensure that natural resource values are maintained.

Significant Public Involvement Findings

- When the Community Survey was completed in early 2003, more than 82% of survey respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of maintenance in Eugene's park, open spaces and recreation facilities.
- When the Speakers Bureau presentations were conducted in Spring 2003, more than 85% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of park, open space, and facility maintenance.
- For Speakers Bureau respondents, the top two priorities for improving Eugene's natural areas were: provide more passive recreation opportunities, such as trails and benches (27%); and improve habitat in existing natural areas and remove invasive species (23%).

E. Community Volunteers



Eugene residents are active and involved, and they care about the future of the community. The number of participants in the PROS planning process is a testimony to the civic involvement of so many citizens. Eugene already offers extensive volunteer opportunities, both in parks and for recreation programs. For example, volunteers donated 28,390 hours of time in Eugene's recreation programs, parks, and natural areas in 2002. This was equivalent to the work of almost 14 full-time employees. Volunteer opportunities with the City of Eugene allow residents to use their leisure time to improve the community and the environment and to contribute to the health and well-being of their neighbors.



Eugene offers several volunteer opportunities in parks, including:

- Eugene Stream Team volunteers perform water quality and fish and wildlife habitat enhancement projects.
- The Volunteers In Parks (VIP) program offers short-term and longer-term citizen involvement opportunities in beautification, maintenance, and trail development in Eugene's parks.
- NeighborWoods is a tree planting and stewardship program that was established in 1992. Since then, over 8,000 trees have been planted and established by volunteers.

The City also offers volunteer opportunities in recreation programming, including formal programs such as Support Hult Center Operations (SHO) and the Senior Volunteer Program, as well as other highly valued volunteer opportunities in Specialized Recreation, Youth & Family, and Community Services program areas.

During the PROS planning process, expanding volunteer opportunities was a major theme. In particular, many participants recommended that the City offer more opportunities for youth and conduct additional outreach to engage young people in civic volunteerism. Increased opportunities for adults and opportunities in environmental stewardship for all residents were also major themes.

Volunteerism offers many benefits to the City and to the volunteers themselves. Through volunteerism and contributions, community members can:

- Build neighborhood connections and pride;
- Be physically active;
- Create healthy, happy childhoods for children;
- Support a social cause or interest;
- Leave a legacy;
- Learn something new;
- Meet people;
- Memorialize or honor a loved one;
- Make Eugene a safer place; and
- Give a tax deductible gift to the community.



*Volunteer opportunities
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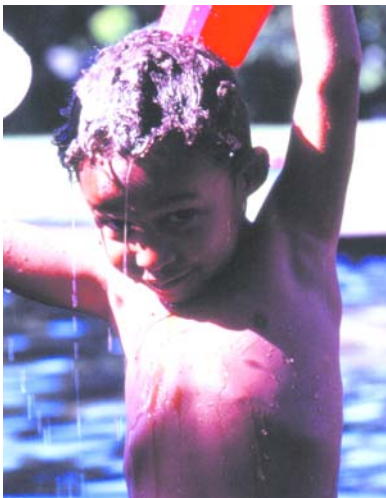


For the City, volunteerism expands resources for maintenance, environmental restoration, recreation programs, and other park and recreation activities. In a time of increased competitiveness for the City's General Fund revenues, volunteers greatly benefit the community by augmenting City staff. Additionally, the pride and ownership that citizens develop for Eugene's Parks and Open Space System through volunteering, translates into on-going support and advocacy for the entire system. While the City will need to expand staffing to oversee the growing volunteer program and to coordinate the recruitment, training, and recognition of volunteers, the benefits provided to the City far outweigh the costs.

Significant Public Involvement Findings

- Participants in the Recreation and Social Service Provider Focus Group noted that for teens, there was a lack of meaningful programs and services, such as community service opportunities.
- Open Space focus group participants identified that expanded volunteer opportunities should be provided for habitat and natural resource enhancement activities, and that these opportunities should include education.
- Open Space focus group participants identified a need for more opportunities for youth involvement in natural resources.
- Maintenance Staff focus group participants noted the value of volunteers in parks, who could assist with park clean-up, invasive species removal, and enforcement of park rules (such as reminding people to clean up after dogs).

F. Youth Development



Youth development is a high priority for the Eugene community. The City has focused its recreation programming in recent years to concentrate on youth. In addition, the City has used two local option levies to help fund recreation services for youth. Measure 20-37 resulted in more than \$700,000 per year for neighborhood-based youth activities during non-school hours. The levy expired at the end of December 2003. Measure 20-67 is a four-year local option levy passed in November 2002 that provides funding for City youth services such as Summer Fun For All, in addition to providing funding to the two school districts for youth activities and resources.

Between 1990 and 2000, the population under 18 years of age in Eugene increased 17 percent. In Eugene, youth, especially teens, are the highest priority for increased services, according to results of the Comprehensive Plan public involvement process. In addition, promoting youth development was one of the most important benefits of parks and recreation cited by community members during Comprehensive Plan public outreach activities. The City has already

begun to strengthen youth programming by forming partnerships with many recreation and social service providers to implement the local option levy programs and activities. All of these efforts underscore the commitment of our community to youth. These efforts will continue and will be expanded with the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Recently, the City has begun to focus its programming efforts on fostering the development of the assets or skills that youth need in order to become contributing and successful community members. This approach, first developed by the Search Institute, has been recognized for its success in reducing crime, drugs and alcohol, and teen pregnancy. This Plan continues to strengthen this youth development effort by providing trained staff, equipment and funding to successfully foster youth development. Through youth development, we will support the creation of a better future for our community.



Through youth development, Eugene will create a better future

Significant Public Involvement Findings

- Throughout the public involvement process, youth and teens were consistently identified as the population most in need of additional recreation services.
- About 60% of Community Survey respondents said certain groups in the City of Eugene need more or better recreation services. These groups are: middle school youth 12 to 14 years of age (18%); high school youth 15 to 18 years of age (16%), and elementary school youth 6 to 11 years of age (13%).
- Participants in the Recreation Providers and Multi-Cultural focus groups held during the planning process identified youth as needing expanded services, with after-school programs cited as a specific need.
- Participants in the Recreation Providers focus group identified a lack of access to services for non-mainstream youth, including homeless, gay, and lesbian youth.

